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ABSTRACT

A description of what occurs in the social context of the supervisory conference, based on the concept of conversational inference, a process by which participants assess each others' intentions and make appropriate responses, is presented in this paper. Using the illustration of a supervisor's request for teacher action that occurs in a conference, the paper explores the premise that spoken language is interpretable only in its context. A practical approach is therefore taken to study spoken discourse as a social process, examining the embedded meaning of speech acts and the listener's interpretations. Methodology involved analysis of videotape and interview transcriptions from Grimmett and Crehan's study of supervisory conference interaction. Findings suggest that given a direct or indirect request for action by the supervisor, the teacher's acceptance or rejection of the "suggestion" is partially dependent on the teacher's views of the fit between the suggestion and class needs and his or her ability to enact the suggestion. Failing to address these concerns may preclude translation of the preferred suggestion or discovered solution into action. Further examination of supervisor/teacher interaction demonstrates rules for participation. A discussion of the relevance and applications of discourse analysis for teacher development and improved supervisory practices concludes the paper. (55 references) (LMI)

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THE RELEVANCE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES: AN EXPLORATION

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THE RELEVANCE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES: AN EXPLORATION

Language is a dynamic and compelling force in our society. The utterance of certain words by certain people can invoke a baptism, a marriage, or the naming of a ship. Acts of speech convey authority and mandates, rituals and rules. Styles of speech imply norms and customs in particular settings. Indeed, consideration of verbal interactions leads inevitably to the conclusion that people do powerful things with words. In education, as elsewhere, language has the potential to inspire confidence and give rise to profound reflection and growth, or evoke fear and unintentionally breed the very attitudes that prevent thoughtful practice and improvement.

Citing renewed interest in examining the supervisory conference, the scarcity of studies exploring interpretation as an aspect of the conference, and the relative imbalance of theory versus thorough, systematic research on the supervisory conference, Holland recently called for more and varied research, including qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, for exploring the phenomenon of conferring[1]. In a study of the effect of informational and controlling language used by supervisors in simulated supervisory conferences, Pajak and

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[1]Patricia E. Holland, "Implicit Assumptions about the Supervisory Conference: A Review and Analysis of Literature," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 4 (Summer 1989): 362-379.

Glickman[2] made similar recommendations which centered on Fishbein and Ajzen's[3] paradigm of "who says what, how, to whom, with what effects?"

What is it about the talk in supervisory conferences and the environment of those conferences that enables some teachers to learn and apply their learnings while others fail? Can studies of conference conversations shed light on this question?

By the way of an illustration of a supervisor's request for teacher action which occurs in a conference, this paper explores the premise that the verbal process of language is potent but interpretable only in its context, its situation. So, in order to provide insight into the effects of human communication and verbal interaction in supervisory conferences, it becomes necessary to take a functional or practical, rather than formal approach. In this kind of study of language and its use, researchers go beyond the narrow examination or sense of linguistics--phonological, lexical, and syntactic features--to the complex study of meaning. That identical utterances can have different meanings (e.g., "I'm hungry," as spoken by a child reluctant to go to bed versus a homeless person on the street) makes this point. There is also always embedded in such study the extraordinarily complicating factor of listeners' various interpretations of intended messages.

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[2]Edward Pajak and Carl Glickman, "Informational and Controlling Language in Simulated Supervisory Conferences," American Educational Research Journal 26 (Spring 1989): 93-106.

[3]M. Fishbein and I. Ajzen, Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

Primary to the thesis is this point: grammaticality is not the issue here. A grammarian might be concerned with rules of usage in sentences, but discourse analysts look at sentences as they make texts, which may have grammatical cohesion but not be coherent; even incoherent utterances can make discourse. Naturally occurring talk, or even seminaturally occurring talk, as may be found in a conference, may be irregular but can still be analyzed by rules of use which describe how utterances perform social acts. The study of spoken discourse as a social, rather than individual process, expands beyond linguists to include sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers who study the framework of the interrelationship of linguistic form, semantic interpretation, and a practical approach to understanding communicative competence. Thus we must give emphasis to recording what has been said and analyzing it for patterns.[4]

This designation of the complex cognitive and social phenomenon called discourse was foreshadowed by Chomsky when he extended the study of the formal features of language, positing particularly the independence of grammaticality from meaningfulness (Note his famous example of linguistic nonsense: "colorless green ideas sleep furiously").[5] Hymes then argued

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[4]Evidence of the current status of this essentially interpretive work is found in the current lack of consensus as to how many "functions" or types of speech acts there are in discourse, with various analysts declaring that there are anywhere from a few dozen to thousands according to individual definitions.

[5]Noam Chomsky, Syntactic Structures (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).

the conversational competence or ability to produce appropriate utterances, instead of the linguistic competence or ability to produce grammatical sentences, of a speaker, which in turn opened the door to a consideration of the study of the total verbal process in context.[6] An early study using this approach divided the elements of a buying and selling process into stages (i.e. salutation, asking price, investigating, bargaining, and conclusion) and recognized that certain stages may not always occur or may be realized non-verbally.[7] This was far removed from a purely linguistic analysis and in it he recognized the larger elements potentially embedded in an entire activity.

The question immediately at hand is this: Is it possible to go beyond identification of the stages of supervision recognized in a clinical cycle,[8] notably the conference, to identification of patterns embedded in the discourse of the conference? As complicated as it may be, it is this kind of study of conversation where "we shall find the key to a better understanding of what language is and how it works".[9] We must

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[6]Dell Hymes, "Sociolinguistics and the Ethnography of Speaking," in Social Anthropology and Linguistics, Monograph 10 ed. E. Ardener (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp.47-93.

[7]T.F. Mitchell, "The Language of Buying and Selling in Cyrenaica," Hesperis 44 (1957): 31-71.

[8]Robert Goldhammer, Clinical Supervision: Special Methods for the Supervision of Teachers (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969).

[9]John Rupert Firth, "The Technique of Semantics," in Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 32.

study real acts of communication, albeit confusing and inconsistent. Through this research analysts themselves can become students of "communicative competence". Beyond these critical applications, the deeper challenge lies in linking scholars and practitioners in a heuristic for understanding the conference, in context.

Pursuit of this question necessitates that we be less concerned at the onset with presenting findings than we are with presenting the basis of on-going study, the progress of our research, our method of pursuit of discourse analysis applications, and our insights. Our beginning struggles and confusions merely emphasize that the way ahead is yet to become clear.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The study of narrative has taken place in anthropology, linguistics, semiotics, poetics, psychology, sociology, and communication research. In education, scholars have studied discourse from the perspectives of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, ethnomethodology and the sociology of language, educational psychology, the philosophy of language, computational linguistics, and narrative inquiry.[10] [11] Thus a

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[10]Judith L. Green and Cynthia Wallat, Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings, Vol 5 in the series: Advances in Discourse Processes, ed. Roy O. Freedle (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1981).

diversity of disciplines share an interest in the various forms of discourse study, from dialogue analysis to computer simulation of natural language and cross-cultural comparisons of communicative competence and analysis of style, rhetoric, argumentation, and persuasive communication.

Coulthard described spoken text at four major organizational levels, the third of which is discourse:

1. phonology (e.g. phonemes, syllables)
2. grammar (e.g. morphemes, clauses, sentences)
3. discourse (acts, moves, exchanges, transactions)
4. non-linguistic (stages, transactions)[12]

Analysts move from linguistic structures such as utterances and question-answer pairs at the lower level to linguistic functions, which implies the level between grammar and non-linguistic organization, discourse. In research on classrooms, this level known as discourse might include a lesson; the non-linguistic level could be represented by a course, period or topic. In studies of conversational interactions, we seek to identify principles by which speech acts group into more inclusive discourse units and to characterize the nature of these units. Thus the unit of analysis could be a joke, a myth, or a classroom lesson. As noted, discourse analysis, as a socio-linguistic

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[11]F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," Educational Researcher 19 (June-July 1990): 2-14.

[12]R. Malcolm Coulthard, An Introduction to Discourse Analysis (London: Longman, 1977).

analysis of naturally spoken discourse, is concerned with the functional use of language, not merely grammatical units.

The original work of studying language use, texts, conversational interaction, or communicative events became integrated under the common label of discourse analysis well after it was applied to chalk-and-talk classrooms in the mid-1960's. Flanders' system[13] has been widely criticized for failing to deal with non-verbal aspects and informal class situations; and even though it is a crude division of all that is said in the classroom into forms of teacher talk, student talk, and silence or confusion, the system is still helpful because it shows who controls the topic, not the talking. Bellack, Hiebard, Hyman, and Smith, in more linguistic and less temporal work, had earlier designed a more useful structure which looked at the amount and quality of pupil participation.[14] They identified the four pedagogical moves of structuring, soliciting, responding, and reacting. A few years later, Barnes was able to demonstrate how teachers interrupt, confuse, dominate, and constrict students.[15]

Subsequent analyses of naturally occurring talk emerged in the spurt of research on different formal yet at the same time informal settings (e.g., doctor-patient interviews, mother-child

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[13]Ned A. Flanders, Analyzing Teacher Behavior (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1970).

[14]Arno A. Bellack, Herbert M. Hiebard, Ronald T. Hyman, and Frank L. Smith, The Language of the Classroom (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966).

[15]Douglas R. Barnes, "Language in the Secondary Classroom," in Language, the Learner, and the School, eds. Douglas R. Barnes, James N. Britton and Harold Rosen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

talk, seminar discussions, and therapy sessions). It is anticipated that such "talk situations" or "styles of talk" may be ultimately charted against a general model of the potential structure of discourse.[16]

Recent work in analyzing classroom discourse includes approaches such as study of density of teacher speech acts, multilayer analyses of teacher-class and student-student discourse, speech acts categorization, and interactional rules for participation in lessons, the latter being especially interesting as it has revealed irreconcilable differences between teacher-class and student-student discourse.[17] Even institutional authority has been studied in relation to discourse[18] and may be a basis for proceeding in classroom as well as conference analyses.

At this point, many major descriptive problems in the analysis of spoken discourse remain unsolved. There is no theoretical discussion, no discourse structure, no existing comprehensive linguistic examination of interaction, nor any

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[16]After being subjected to this kind of examination, even family crossword puzzle solving, parties, television quiz shows, and leisure conversations have been shown to have typical or recognizable patterns, rules, and structures.

[17]Judith L. Green and Judith O. Harker, Multiple Perspective Analyses of Classroom Discourse (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1988).

[18]Sue Fisher and Alexandra Dundas Todd, Discourse and Institutional Authority: Medicine, Education, and Law (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Pub. Corp., 1986.

language theory of interaction.[19] [20] Yet, as Labov noted, "Formalization is a fruitful procedure, even when it is wrong: it sharpens our questions and promotes the search for answers."[21] As in studies of classroom interaction, discourse analysis may prove to be a heuristic for understanding the practical problems of communication in conferences, as well as in other supervisor-teacher verbal interactions.[22]

Most intriguing of all would be to link our combination of social and linguistic dimensions of these situations, because as

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[19]Malcolm Coulthard and David Brazil, "Exchange Structure," in Studies in Discourse Analysis, eds. Malcolm Coulthard and Martin Montgomery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1981), pp. 82-106.

[20]Malcolm Coulthard, Montgomery Martin, and David Brazil, "Developing a Description of Spoken Discourse," in Studies in Discourse Analysis eds. Malcolm Coulthard and Martin Montgomery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), pp. 1-50.

[21]William Labov, "The Study of Language in its Social Context," in Sociolinguistic Patterns (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1972), p. 121.

[22]For a particularly clear and interesting example of such discovered patterns, see William Labov, "Rules for Ritual Insults," in Studies in Social Interaction, comp. David Sudnow (New York: Free Press, 1972), pp. 120-169, in which he describes the speech event of "sounding" or "the dozens" among American black males in south central Harlem. "Sounding" consists of a dialogue performed spontaneously for an audience of peer observers, in which the participants trade insults, typically about the other person's mother, self, or house. Losers are those being "topped" by a ritual insult, as opposed to a personal insult. The attribution must be so outlandish as to be clearly untrue in the eyes of both participants, for example, "Your mother raised you on ugly milk," or "When I came to your house, seven roaches jumped on me and one search me." (pp. 136-137). Sounding comprises a competitive sequence, and its forms and syntax led Labov to formulate rules for sounding as a speech event. Even conflict can be shown, in this way as well as others, to be not just chaos but a speech event with pattern and structure.

this new discipline of discourse analysis begins to define its frontiers and methodology, we have the opportunity to guard against scientism,[23] to address the indeterminism and unpredictability in human behavior,[24] to avoid the misguided quantitative-qualitative debate and work instead in terms of "logics in use" associated with various methodologies,[25] to begin to take the hermeneutic approach to supervision.[26]

REQUESTS FOR ACTION

Supervisors' Requests

Instructional supervisors often utter speech acts known as requests for action during the course of an instructional

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[23]Thomas J. Sergiovanni, "Science and Scientism in Supervision and Teaching," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 4 (Winter 1989): 93-105.

[24]Gary A. Cziko, "Unpredictability and Indeterminism in Human Behavior: Arguments and Implications for Educational Research," Educational Researcher 18 (April 1989): 17-25.

[25]For a discussion of the qualitative-quantative incompatibility thesis and interpretivism which does not focus exclusively on the insider's (teacher's) perspective but which allows inclusion of objectivity, facts, and an outsider's perspective, see Kenneth Howe and Margaret Eisenhart, "Standards for Qualitative (and Quantitative) Research: A Prolegomenon," Educational Researcher 19 (May 1990): 2-9. In collapsing the positivism-alternative paradigm split the authors suggest grounding such research in "logics in use, the judgments, purposes, and values that make up research activities themselves." They further warn against a "blitzkrieg ethnography" wherein method is misunderstood or research questions fail to drive data collection and analysis [see also Ray C. Rist, "Blitzkrieg Ethnography: On the Transformation of a Method Into a Movement," Educational Researcher 9 (February 1980): 8-10].

[26]Noreen B. Garman, "Theories Embedded in the Events of Clinical Supervision: A Hermeneutic Approach," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 5 (Spring 1990): 201-213.

conference. While their larger purpose may be to explore critical instructional concerns with the goal of assisting teachers in reflectively transforming classroom teaching,[27] and while on many occasions the same ends may be reached without making requests, it is likely that a teacher's subsequent action related to a supervisor's suggestion is dependent on certain critical factors of interpretation. For example, a supervisor's suggestion, "you could put them in small groups," may be perceived variously as an appropriate and helpful hint to be pursued in practice or as a faithless imposition on the teacher's freedom to behave as he/she sees fit under current circumstances. What makes this so?

Initially, the teacher's recognition of a direct or indirect request for action depends on complicated concepts well beyond the scope of this discussion,[28] but may include framework, topic, and preconditions. It is these preconditions, embedded in rules of interpretation, that we wish to explore in hopes of reaching our objective.

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[27]Peter P. Grimmett and E. Patricia Crehan, "Barry: A Case Study of Teacher Reflection in Clinical Supervision," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 5 (Spring 1990): 214-235.

[28]See Dell Hymes, "Ways of Speaking," in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, eds. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 433-452, for details of his suggestions that ethnographers studying speech events (such as a conference, possibly) initially define structure, topic, participants, setting, purposes, key (i.e., tone, manner, or spirit), and spoken and written channels. Other elements may include message content, norms, behaviors such as rule breaking and face threatening acts.

Rules of Interpretation

Some discussion of the concepts of prerequisites, indirectness, and force are essential to our exploration into teacher interpretation of supervisor requests.

Prerequisites. To begin, Labov described highly useful rules of interpretation of requests which link what is said with what is done.[29] He formalized the prerequisites for an utterance imperative in form to be heard as a valid request for action: If A requests B to perform an action X at a time T, A's utterance will be heard as a valid command if the following conditions hold: It is an AB event that

1. X should be done for a purpose Y.
2. B has the ability to do X.
3. B has the obligation to do X.
4. A has the right to tell B to do X.

It follows that a speaker can then challenge various of these preconditions.

In an extension of Labov's preconditions for the interpretation of any utterance as a request for action, Burton suggested that an utterance is a valid informative only if:

5. A is in a position to inform B of P (an item of information).
6. P is a reasonable piece of information.
7. B does not already know P.

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[29]William Labov, "The Study of Language in its Social Context," in Stadium Generale 23 (1970), 66-84.

8. B is interested in P.

9. B is not offended or insulted by P.

Again by extension, if asked for a response concerning a question M, it is valid if

10. B hears M as a sensible question.

11. A does not know M.

12. It is the case that B might know M.

13. It is the case that A can be told M.

14. It is the case that B holds no objection to telling M to A.[30]

We can readily see that these concepts may well apply to our analysis of verbal interaction in conferences. How is it that a supervisor's request, statement, suggestion, or question is seen as valid by a teacher?[31] How does a grammatical request for information become a request for action?[32] For what reasons, as implied above, might a teacher challenge, refuse to act on, or merely ignore a suggestion even if it is appropriate and helpful?

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[30]Dierdre Burton, "Analyzing Spoken Discourse," in Studies in Discourse Analysis, eds. Malcolm Coulthard and Martin Montgomery (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), pp. 61-81.

[31]Both suggestions and requests are imperative forms used to get someone to do something. A supervisor making a suggestion assumes no special authority over the teacher, as opposed to the giver of an order, demand, plea, or request.

[32]For more on whimperative phenomena--sincere utterances that do not mean exactly what they literally say, or words which have the form and intonation of a question but the restrictions and illocutionary force of an imperative, as in "Why don't you try a different book?"--see Georgia M. Green, "How To Get People To Do Things With Words," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, eds. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 107-141. The author also discusses suggestions, hints, loaded questions, and traps.

Indirectness. Requests for action are often indirect and can be grouped according to Searle's categories of sentences concerning the hearer's ability or future action, desire, or willingness; the speaker's wish or want; the reasons for the action; or combinations of these.[33] For example, a variety of a supervisor's indirect requests for action which reflect these categories might be:

Can you just move the projector a bit?

Will you (are you going to) move the projector?

I would like you to move (to try moving) the projector.

Would you mind moving the projector?

It might help if you move the projector.

I don't think you tried the projector on the other side.

Can I ask you to move the projector?

One more form might include the words, "Let's...," which has an underlying second-person subject; this can be interpreted by a teaacher as an imperative. Of course, what is important is the variety of effects in making the request, even if indirect, in different forms. As noted, a teacher's interpretation of such request forms and their implications may well determine the likelihood of his or her embracing and acting on the request.

Force. If the speech act of making the request is actually hoped to have the force of ordering or commanding an action (as often happens in conference), Searle noted that three conditions must exist:

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[33]John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3 eds. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 59-82.

1. the preparatory condition--the speaker is in a position of authority over the hearer.

2. the sincerity condition--the speaker wants the act done.

3. the essential condition--the speaker intends the utterance as an attempt to get the hearer to do the action.[34]

One can derive from these points the fact that many instructional supervisors' words have the illocutionary force of an order and are imputed as such by the teacher! Yet, as mentioned, such suggestions may well, and at times appropriately, be ignored.

For our purposes, we now move to a tentative adaptation of Labov's, Burton's and Searle's rules for interpreting an utterance as a request for action, whether direct or indirect: The supervisor's utterance is heard as a valid request for action (e.g. not insulting, joking, or simply irrelevant) only if the following conditions hold:

1. the requested action is purposeful and appropriate to the need.

2. the teacher is able to perform (or has been taught how to perform) the action.

3. the teacher is not offended by the suggestion (e.g. a teacher who already knows the solution to the instructional

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[34]John R. Searle, Speech Acts (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

problem or how to improve his or her teaching but who is not given the opportunity to disclose it or arrive at it by reflection may be offended by a suggestion).[35]

Thus if a supervisor proposes, "You could put them in small groups instead of the one large one," one teacher may appreciate and accept this as a suggestion regarding an action which is in the interest of the teacher while another, knowing already that this is a possible solution but being blocked from offering it, from reflectively transforming the experience,[36] from gaining self-insight,[37] or from engaging in a collaborative dialogue,[38] feels offended. This brings us to a rule in supervisory discourse: <u>You don't tell people what you can suppose they know.</u>

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[35]A fourth rule, well beyond the scope of this paper but possibly essential to further research on this facet of conferences, may center on <u>face saving</u>, a component of interaction which often leads a supervisor to indirectness, hinting, and hedging on suggestions, in deference of the teacher's "face" and relative to the weightiness of the potential threat in a request. For a discussion of the interactive acts constituting a threat to <u>face</u> (including, for example, impositions limiting freedom of action) and degrees of politeness, see Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," in <u>Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction</u>, ed. Esther N. Goody (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 56-289. Their discussion also covers the elements of <u>social distance</u> and relative <u>power</u> of speaker and hearer.

[36]Donald A. Schon, "Coaching Reflective Teaching in Reflection," in <u>Reflection in Teacher Education</u> (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), p. 25.

[37]James G. Henderson, "Three Personal Challenges Associated with Contingent Pragmatism," <u>Journal of Curriculum and Supervision</u> 5 (Winter 1990): 171-180.

[38]Noreen B. Garman, "The Clinical Approach to Supervision," in <u>Supervision of Teaching</u>, ed. Thomas J. Sergiovanni (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1982), p. 45.

That is, change is often best achieved through achieving understanding.

Additional facets of such an adaptation may emerge as our progress in this exploration unfolds. We might suppose, for example, that certain inappropriate nonverbal messages on the part of the supervisor may also affect the teacher's interpretation.

One problem that complicates the interpretation of indirect speech acts is the fact that it is possible for the speaker to say one thing and mean that but also to mean something else[39]. For example, a supervisor's statement, "The students are not watching the film," may imply that the projector should be moved or that the teacher needs to control student talking, rather than simply what it literally states.

In any event, "the central significance of indirectness is that the actual illocutionary point is to some extent non-specific, it is essentially non-determinate, a matter of interpretation, of negotiation".[40] Leech calls this "strategic indeterminacy"[41] and examples of it may be found in the case of hinting which is motivated by social concern with face-saving, tact and politeness. What is meant then must be worked towards,

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[39]John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, eds. Peter F. Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, (New York: Academic Press, 1975), p. 60.

[40]Willis Edmondson, Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis (London: Longman, 1981), p. 29.

[41]Geoffrey N. Leech, Language and Tact. Paper No. 46 (Linguistic Agency: University of Trier, 1977).

explicated and negotiated by those in the conversation. It must be emphasized, however, that indirectness is a prime candidate for offense, as a certain lessening of freedom of self-determination is implicit in these acts.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: AN ILLUSTRATION

One way to study conventional procedures in conference is to apply methods which build on the distinction between propositional content, or literal meaning, and illocutionary force, or intended effect, as we analyze conversation in conference. This is the goal of our current research-a description of what is occurring in the social context of the culture of the supervisory conference. The theoretical process which forms the basis of this study is the concept of conversational inference, a process in which participants assess others' intentions and on which they make responses. This intention is what Searle calls "utterer's meaning"[42] or what the speaker intends to achieve, rather than a dictionary interpretation. Since actions are context-dependent, contextual and extralinguistic elements are considered, as are lexical and grammatical rules. For example, understanding the intent and effect of teacher saying to a class, "I don't see any hands," requires an interpretation of the situation, class rules, and teacher behavior and talk.

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[42]John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3, eds. Peter F. Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 59-82.

An Illustration

This initial illustration is not intended to represent a broad-based analysis of a series of conferences, but to offer an example of the potential of applying discourse concepts to conference interaction.[43] A preliminary step included an extensive review of the literature and studies on the supervisory conference, which revealed no applications of conversation or discourse analysis methods.

It is important to note at the onset of this exploration that informal speech or spoken language include the following primary features: it is much less structured; it contains many incomplete sentences, sequences of phrases, or isolated ritual clauses; and it has other problems which make spontaneous speech particularly difficult to analyze and interpret.[44] In addition, as a heuristic device exploring context definition and questions

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[43]A multilevel project which examines conference discourse or naturally occurring conversation in a variety of contexts is currently underway at The University of Georgia and will provide reports of related analyses across conferences with beginning and experienced supervisors. This research draws on the perspectives of the teacher, the supervisor, the observer, as well as the data analyst. The research team anticipates that a variety of methods should be further explored in the endeavors: recall interviews with participants, induction from observations, induction from coding systems, and hypothesis testing experiments when justified. Combining such methods in multidisciplinary studies as suggested by William Labov in "What is a Linguistic Fact?" (Lisse: Peter de Riddler Press, 1975), is also being considered. Interested colleagues are urged to contact Jo Roberts, Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum and Supervision, 124 Aderhold Hall, College of Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30624. Project title: Conferring with professionals: Discourse analysis applications for educational supervisors.

[44]Gillian Brown and George Yule, Discourse Analysis (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

of socialization, a microanalysis and structural representations of conversation are normally optimally served by videotape, which acts as a check on transcription, coding and protocol, and message transmission, especially as analyzed post hoc.

For the purposes of this illustration, thick-focused descriptions of classroom practice and analysis of episodes taken from a conference provided interesting scenarios within which to conduct this preliminary examination of the relevance of discourse analysis for understanding the supervisory conference. The presence of the hierarchical element of principal-teacher or supervisor-teacher roles made this particularly interesting.

In addressing our field's lack of studies on supervision and teacher reflection which are grounded in observable events, including conference interaction, Grimmett and Crehan used a profile of teacher Barry's classroom practice, recall interview transcripts, and transcriptions of conference videorecordings, to analyze conference interactions.[45] The episodes reported from one conference highlighted the conditions that constrained or permitted teacher development through reflection.

For this illustration, these scenarios were reanalyzed to determine if the application of certain discourse analysis concepts would bring to light similar or additional useful findings. The following steps were taken:

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[45]Peter P. Grimmett and E. Patricia Crehan, "Barry: A Case Study of Teacher Reflection in Clinical Supervision," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 5 (Spring, 1990): 214-235.

1. The transcriptions were searched for evidence of a supervisor's direct or indirect request for action, or utterances which reasonably may have been interpreted by the teacher as a suggestion or request that the teacher act to improve his teaching by completing certain actions, whether face threatening or not.

2. If such a request existed, a search was made for a fit between the suggested action and the purposes of the class or the needs of the students, as evidenced by teacher talk and/or reflection as well as observer notes.

3a. If such a fit existed, a search was made for (ability) indications that such appropriate action was within the teacher's repertoire or that the teacher received instruction or coaching on how to bring this into his/her repertoire.

3b. If no such fit was in evidence, a search was made for evidence that the supervisor gave the teacher the opportunity to arrive at what the teacher considered to be an appropriate "solution" through reflection.

Findings

The discourse microanalysis of several minutes of the supervisory conference between the principal and Barry reinforced the necessity of facilitating a teacher's reflection but also allowed that, under certain circumstances, the supervisor can suggest (if not request or demand) action related to the supervisor's own solution to the problem.

In the first scenario, the principal implied that the solution to the problem of disengaged students was teacher proximity:

Principal: ...when you went into that second one...then you moved over to those kids. Now they were amazingly involved.

Barry, the teacher, initially accepted and then extended this idea to note the result of having strong personalities in the class:

Teacher: Those kids tend to attract my attention...my attention tends to get directed to that part of the room.

But as Barry began to unravel the complexities of the problem, the principal negated the already-established statement of the problem, reportedly to lower the threat of having identified Barry's instructional weakness:

Principal: ...[those] kids are quite comfortable not being noticed. ...they're also hard-working.

This had the potential effect of limiting the progress of the discussion, but being motivated to improve his teaching, Barry persisted. He had recognized that a problem existed, and he appeared to want help:

Teacher: But I'm not sure what to do...you know, find some technique.

Here the principal immediately seized the opportunity to make a suggestion, potentially interpretable as an indirect request for action, which was the principal's own prescription for action:

Principal: ...you might think at a certain point of sort of changing the position [of the projector] so it's on the other side [of the room].

She emphasized this suggestion:

> Principal: You could try it. It would be really interesting to see how that affects...

Once again, the principal supported Barry personally, but recanted on the problem, saying, "They were just as involved, even though they were not doing as much talking...." It is fortunate that Barry saw the principal's solution during this interchange as merely a suggestion, rather than an imperative. The latter may have compelled him to follow the principal's idea to the letter. What happened instead was that Barry saw no fit between that proposed action and the real need of the students; that is, fulfilling the supervisor's request to address his own proximity to students was, in Barry's view, the wrong solution to the problem of having a class-within-a-class. Hence Barry politely ignored it, and intuitively attempted to pursue his own reflection on the problem and its solution:

> Teacher: ...either way, the others don't interact with them very much. It seems like they're almost a little class within the larger class. It's strange.

Regrettably, Barry was thwarted in his attempt to find what he deemed a fitting solution. The question of his ability to enact a change did not surface because neither the discussion nor Barry's thinking progressed far enough to contemplate action and ability to perform it. Barry may have heard the supervisor's suggestion, but he did not solve the problem.

In the second episode, the principal again made a request for action, softened by the use of words like "maybe" and "kind of":

> Principal: ...maybe just for the time, you need to be thinking of some very sort of short productive kind of thing that can be done at these times. Kind of have those sorts of things there.

Barry might have inferred that he was supposed to then act on this suggestion, but he could hardly have interpreted it as an order.[46] Also, while the principal's intention may not be available for examination, the teacher's interpretation is evident in his response. This is significant since it is what determines the progress of the interaction. Barry asked for examples of solutions to the problem, and the principal provided some possible solutions from her own experience, as before:

> Principal: ...the kids would often be quite willing to just sit and be read to.
>
> Teacher: ...but what sort of things?
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> Principal: ...something important for you.
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> Teacher: ...something that is recognized as a poem.
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> Principal: ...maybe something you're reading from the library.

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[46]Videotapes prove helpful in analyses of conference portions such as this, since hints and clues have the syntax and intonation of questions (or statements if in statement form), but true orders, requests, and suggestions have the syntactic properties and intonation of corresponding imperative forms.

As noted by Grimmett and Crehan, this formed a metaphor for action for Barry. In this case, Barry ultimately recognized a fit between the suggested solution (or request for action or demand) and the needs of the students, and by giving his own examples Barry showed that was able to transform the ideas to fit his own situation. This was, of course, facilitated by allowing his reflection.

As previously noted, our understanding of conference realities must go beyond analysis of dyads interacting to a broader social context, just as Jackson's study of classrooms reflected an insistence that research account for "realities" of the classroom.[47] So, to know whether this interpretation is truly adequate requires confirmation by the participants. We would also want to ask about reflection, facilitated insight, and the element of "face" to broaden our understanding of the conference interaction. Furthermore, the question of what was later enacted in the classroom is important.

This analysis differs slightly from Grimmett and Crehan's analysis of the scenario in that it first focuses on interpretation of extant imperatives (e.g., in the first scenario, we saw that Barry was not offended at what he interpreted as a suggestion, but he employed politeness to avoid it.). Grimmett and Crehan indicated that an essential component of an effective conference centers on whether the teacher

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[47]Philip Jackson, Life in Classrooms (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

reflects on classroom activity, names the problem, and frames the solution. This reanalysis sugests that a supervisor may name the problem and frame possible solutions (as in the second scenario), but that the teacher's perceived fit of the articulated solution with the problem and the teacher's perceived ability to enact the solution are essential elements of an effective conference.

Conclusions

Some tentative preliminary observations about the nature of teacher development through reflection in the setting of the conference may be possible from our venture. Using this adaptation of the rules of interpretation of requests for action, we might suggest general elements of interaction between the supervisor and the teacher:

> Given a direct or indirect request for action (or even a request for information which has the force of an order by virtue of a teacher's interpretation and the supervisor's perceived authority) on the part of the supervisor, the teacher's acceptance or rejection of the "suggestion" is partially dependent on the teacher's view of the fit between the suggestion and the class needs as well as on the teacher's perception of his/her ability to enact the suggestion. Failing to address these concerns may preclude translation of the preferred suggestion (or discovered solution) into action.

It is also possible that by further examining how supervisor-teacher pairs like Barry and the principal interact with one another, implicit rules for participation in supervisor-teacher interaction can be described. For example, we may discover who may speak, how turns are taken, what role face plays, norms for encoding difficulties, clashes of norms and conditions of norm breaking, results of rule breaking, and more. Across conferences, we may discover whether supervisors typically do or do not attend to these simple, yet important aspects of conference interaction in those cases when they offer ideas to teachers.

THE RELEVANCE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Dijk has said that discourse analysis "provides us with rather powerful, while subtle and precise, insights to pinpoint the everyday manifestations and displays of social problems in communication and interaction."[48] In this sense, we may view a sentence grammar as theoretically indefensible[49] and discourse analysis as a necessity rather than an option or a luxury[50] for

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[48]Teun A. van Dijk, "Introduction: The Role of Discourse Analysis in Society," in Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Vol. 4, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (London: Academic Press, 1985), p. 7.

[49]Wilbur Pickering, A Framework for Discourse Analysis (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics and The University of Texas at Arlington, 1980). p. 5.

[50]Robert E. Longacre, ed., Discourse Grammar: Studies in Indigenous Languages of Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador, Part I (Dallas, TX; Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington, 1976), p. 2.

understanding supervisor-teacher interaction. This emerging discipline requires that we get to a level above the sentence and to a cultural and behavioral setting for language.

A linguist may be able to present findings briefly, apply abstract rules, then allow readers to add their own lexical items for comparisons and evaluations. But a correct grammatical analysis of a language cannot be achieved without attending to discourse level conventions. What is intended? What is interpreted? Is the talk balanced, reflective, a matter of taking turns, controlled by one participant or the other? What is the tone and context for the conference? The analysis is much more difficult, yet significant; it is only by studying discourse, for example, that we understand the purposes of different types of clauses.

We have come to some notions about the relevance of discourse analysis of supervisory conferences:

1. Discourse or conversation analysis represents a new direction for understanding the nature of social interaction in the educational setting of the supervisory conference.
2. Patterns may exist across the various supervision contexts we wish to study.
3. There may be a value in combining ethnographic and experimental methods in discourse or conversation analysis of supervisory conferences.

4. We must identify situational or cultural factors which impose constraints on discourse in the conference or in other supervisor-teacher interactions.

5. Discourse analysis may be a key to mechanisms involved in institutional management and individual improvement.

6. We can build a body of knowledge on what supervisors and teachers know but have never shared.

Thus far, we have only a partial understanding of the components of discourse analysis, hence a danger of making over-generalizations and erroneous claims exists. What is needed is a motivated and critical group of linguists and social scientists who can study with teachers and supervisors to respond to critical questions and provide what may be socially powerful answers, rather than discussing trivial examples of language use and communication. We will then know more about the rules and moves of everyday talk between teachers and supervisors. We will begin to understand basic elements as well as features of context such as role, power, status, institutions, conflict, body language and paralanguage, gaze, interruption, topic changes, rituals, intonation, strategy, and claims to authority. We may even select other important phenomena and locations for inquiry.

Can we explore interpretation as an aspect of the conference? If we proceed, some initial questions may include:

1. How do supervisors put words together? What particular combinations of words lead to particular meanings for teachers? Can a study of the ethnography of communication help?

2. What are the factors in the communication of supervisory expectations?

3. How can we display and classify the system components which we discover so that they provide a heuristic for analysis of conference patterns and exchanges?

4. What must supervisors learn in order to have communicative competence?

5. Are there other supervisor-teacher interactions which should be examined?

6. How do our findings relate to recent studies on concepts such as access,[51] the teacher's control of positive verbal prefixes,[52] and supervisor and teacher conceptual levels?[53]

7. What is the logic and etiquette, the social structure and its related cultural values, of the conference?

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[51]Arthur Blumberg and R. Stevan Jonas, "The Teacher's Control Over Supervision," Educational Leadership 44 (May 1987): 58-63.

[52]Robert L. Shrigley and Ronald A. Walker, "Positive Verbal Response Patterns: A Model for Successful Supervisor-Teacher Conferences," School Science and Mathematics, (November 1981): 560-562.

[53]Peter P. Grimmett, "A Study of the Relationship of Supervisor and Teacher Conceptual Level During Classroom Improvement Conferences" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April, 1984).

This discussion suggests the possibility that what we do not know is more important at this stage than what little we have found, and that we need to be curious and optimistic. We can identify a wealth of elements in supervisor-teacher interaction which are ripe for study, and the proper domain of this inquiry is language use in its social context, actual practice. We need to expand our understandings beyond the solid but singular research of three decades ago[54] and closely examine conference situations as they naturally occur.

Is the contribution of the supervisor to the development of the teacher highly significant? Can a supervisor achieve a kind of "communicative competence" that increases the likelihood of teacher improvement? Are we ready to explore, through research, the mutually interpretive aspects of the supervisory conference?[55]

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[54]Arthur Blumberg and Edward Amidon, "Teacher Perceptions of Supervisor-Teacher Interactions," Administrator's Notebook 14 (September 1965): 1-4.

[55]I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Vicki Faircloth in a variety of capacities throughout the project to explore discourse analysis applications to supervisory acts.